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ABSTRACT

As the profession of school counseling has developed during the recent years, it has become widely accepted that a primary function of the school counselor is the facilitation and enrichment of the personal development of the students with whom he works. Facilitative conditions are discussed relative to the research in this area. Models of counselor client functioning are discussed. These models are based on levels, one being the lowest and five being the highest level of facilitative conditions. The research done uses these levels in evaluating taped interviews. Results include: (1) the level of formal preparation bears little relationship to the helper's level of functioning, and (2) at least half of the counseling relationships in which the typical school counselor participates are apt to have harmful consequences to the student who comes for help. Implications of these findings indicate that: (1) a clear division of labor among counselors depending on the facilitative conditions they can offer is needed, and (2) there is need for continued development of counseling skill and sensitivity as well as personal development beyond formal training programs. (Author/KJ)

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SCHOOL COUNSELING: FOR BETTER OR FOR WORSE?

James L. Lister

As the profession of school counseling has developed during recent years, it has become widely accepted that a primary function of the school counselor is the facilitation and enrichment of the personal development of the students with whom he works. It is therefore pertinent to review some research literature on the levels of facilitative conditions which school counselors provide their students in order to draw implications for the education, supervision, and practice of the school counselor.

The Facilitative Conditions

Truax, Carkhuff, and associates (Truax & Carkhuff, 1967; Carkhuff, 1967; Carkhuff & Berenson, 1967) have conducted an extensive series of research studies on the effects of therapist-and/or counselor-offered conditions of empathic understanding, congruence or genuineness, and respect or positive regard on the client's level of functioning. Summarized briefly, the results indicate that: there are wide variations among counselors in the ability to provide these conditions within the counseling relationship; clients who receive uniformly high levels of facilitative conditions improve in their levels of personality functioning as judged from ratings of interview behavior and from their performance on objective measures; conversely, clients who receive uniformly low levels of the conditions <u>deteriorate</u> in personality

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functioning; the levels of conditions provided is predominantly a function of the counselor rather than a result of the level at which the client is operating; and the counselor's ability to provide high-level facilitative conditions appears to be increased through some preparation programs and not through others.

Carkhuff, Piaget, and Pierce (1968, pp. 103-104) have described the three facilitative conditions in terms of their assessment on five-point scales developed for rating portions of tape-recorded interviews.

> (a) Empathic understanding (E) ranges from the lowest level (level 1) where the interviewer gives the appearance of being completely unaware or ignorant of even the most conspicuous surface feelings of the other person to the highest level (level 5) where the interviewer comprehensively and accurately communicates his understanding of the other person's deepest feelings;
>
> (b) Respect or positive regard (R) ranges from level 1 where clear negative regard is communicated by the interviewer to level 5 where the interviewer communicates a deep caring for the interviewee;
>
> (c) Genuineness (G) varies from the lowest level where there is a wide discrepancy between the interviewer's verbalizations and his inner experiencing to the highest level where he is deeply himself in the relationship....

Additional conditions, concreteness or specificity of expression and intensity and intimacy of interpersonal contact have also been shown to contribute significantly to the client's improved functioning.

Truax and Carkhuff (1967) have presented extensive theoretical and research evidence that the client's ability to discuss his feelings

on a personal, specific, immediate basis is a reliable antecedent of constructive personality change. "Client depth of self-exploration (Ex)...ranges from level 1 where the client does not explore himself at all to level 5 where he is searching to discover new feelings about himself and his world" (Carkhuff, Piaget, and Pierce, 1968, p. 104). The research literature summarized above indicates a uniformly high positive relationship between the counselor's level of empathic understanding, respect, and genuineness and the client's level of personal self-exploration within the helping relationship.

Carkhuff and Berenson (1967) have proposed a multidimensional model of therapeutic process variables associated with constructive change in client functioning. Their model predicts that counselors who provide higher levels of facilitative conditions can help persons who are functioning at a lower level; conversely, the lower-level counselor is expected to contribute to the personality deterioration of the client who is functioning at a higher level. For example, most clients usually seen for personal counseling or psychotherapy are usually functioning at level three or below on the five-point self-exploration scale. In order for a counselor to effect a constructive change in a client functioning at level three, the counselor would himself have to offer facilitative conditions at an average of level four or above. The level-three client would be seriously impaired as the result of a continued counseling relationship with a counselor who offered conditions at level one or two.

This body of research and the resultant model of counselor-client functioning therefore has profound implications for the school counselor who, in addition to providing information and aiding the student in non-effective areas of functioning, attempts to help him change his view of himself and the world and to overcome subjective distress. Since it can reasonably be expected that the greater majority of students seen for personal counseling by the school counselor will be functioning at level two or above, according to the predictive model of Carkhuff and Berenson (1967), the counselor must therefore offer facilitative conditions at an average overall level of three or greater. The crucial question, then, becomes, at what levels of facilitative conditions are school counseling now operating? Is school counseling for better or for worse?

Levels of Facilitative Conditions offered by School Counselors.

Three recent doctoral studies conducted at the University of Florida provide some direct evidence on the level of facilitative conditions at which school counselors can be expected to function with their clients.

Melloh (1964) measured the level of empathic understanding of 28 NDEA Guidance Institute enrollees at the end of the master's-level counseling practicum. Each student held a one-hour interview with a volunteer client from an undergraduate education course, and two three-minute tape recorded excerpts were taken from each interview as the basis for ratings on empathic understanding. This study employed the

nine-point Truax (Truax & Carkhuff, 1967) Scale for the Measurement of Accurate Empathy which is generally equivalent to the Carkhuff five-point scale for measuring empathic understanding (Carkhuff, Piaget, and Pierce, 1968). Melloh's subjects had an average empathic level of 2.46 on the nine-point scale which is roughly equivalent to level two on the Carkhuff-Berenson model. The other facilitative conditions were not examined in this study, but on the basis of empathic understanding alone, the average counselors in this study would have been capable of helping only the lowest-level clients, and only a few of them would have been capable of increasing the personal functioning of most of the students with whom they would have worked. The prediction, rather, is that most of these counselors would have impeded the development of most of their counselees.

Blane (1967) studied the level of empathic understanding of 30 NDEA Guidance Institute enrollees who were near the end of the master's-level counseling practicum. Each student held a coached-client interview before and after an experimental supervisory session. The average level of empathic understanding measured by the five-point Carkhuff scale was 2.62 and 3.17 before and after supervision, respectively, for the combined treatment groups. As in Melloh's study, no evidence was obtained about these counselors' levels on genuineness or respect, but their predicted level of effectiveness, based on empathic understanding, is at only a minimally facilitative level for school counseling.

Assuming that Blane's sample of counselors were functioning at an average of level three upon completion of their counselor preparation program, the average level counselor could be of assistance to only level-one and level-two students. Counselors functioning at level two would have either been of no help or would have been harmful to most students with whom they would work.

Foulds (1967) obtained measures of empathic understanding, genuineness, and respect from 30 master's-level counselors near the end of the counseling practicum. Students were asked to submit their best counseling interview for use in the research, and two three-minute excerpts were selected from each interview using the five-point Carkhuff scales, the average levels for the 30 counselors were: empathic understanding, 1.80; genuineness, 2.5; and respect, 2.4. The average of 2.23 on the levels of total conditions likewise suggests that these counselors would have been either minimally helpful or harmful to students in a continuing counseling relationship.

Antenen and Lister (1968) studied the empathic understanding of 58 counselors who were completing the master's-level practicum at the University of Florida. Excerpts were taken from tape-recorded role-playing interviews in which the client presented the same problem to each counselor. The average level of empathic understanding was 2.53 based on the nine-point Truax (Truax & Carkhuff, 1967) scale; converted to Carkhuff's five-point model, these counselors were functioning at an approximate average level of 2.0. These counselors were clearly functioning below the minimally facilitative levels, according to the Carkhuff model.

Martin (1968) reported the levels of conditions provided by 52 University of Georgia counselor candidates during the last one-third of their first counseling practicum. The subjects were distributed across school counseling (25), rehabilitation counseling (24), employment service counseling (1), and dean's office counseling (2). Practicum supervisors were trained to use the Truax scales (Truax & Carkhuff, 1967) in evaluating segments of tape-recorded interviews submitted by their students. Scores on the nine-point Truax scale for measuring empathic understanding are converted to the five-point scale for purposes of comparison. Combining the data for all samples reported by Martin yields the following levels: empathic understanding, 2.9 (converted to five-point scale); genuineness, 3.4; and respect, 3.4. A fourth scale, intensity and intimacy of interpersonal contact (Truax, 1962) was also included. The approximate level for the first three conditions averaged 3.23. Assuming that the judges in this study used a frame of reference similar to those in the University of Florida studies, and assuming further that the five-point Truax and Carkhuff scales yield comparable ratings, it appears that the counselors in Martin's study are better equipped to be of personal assistance than any surveyed in this review. Since the practicum supervisors received extensive training in the use of the research scales, it is possible that they may have emphasized the dimensions of empathic understanding, respect, and genuineness more explicitly in their supervision of the subjects in this study. For example, Carkhuff and Truax (1965) demonstrated that an integrated didactic and experiential training program can enable counselors to offer minimally

facilitative levels of conditions after less than 100 hours of training. In spite of the comparatively high level of conditions provided by these counselors, it should be noted that the level-three counselor cannot be of constructive assistance to those students who are functioning at levels four and five; rather he will tend to retard their development. It should also be noted that nearly half of these counselors were functioning below level three, the minimal level of effectiveness for personally assisting all except the extremely low-functioning students.

The following studies did not involve students preparing to serve as school counselors but were instead based upon graduate students in clinical and counseling psychology. However, they provide useful data for speculating about the level of facilitative conditions offered by school counselors.

Bergin and Solomon (1963) studied the level of empathic understanding provided by 18 post-intern clinical psychology students. Their mean level of empathic understanding was 2.50 on a modified version of the Truax (Truax & Carkhuff, 1967) nine-point scale. This converts to approximately level two on the Carkhuff scale. Most of these therapists were clearly ill-equipped, considering their empathic understanding level only, to be of assistance to any but the more seriously disturbed clients. Most of them would, according to the Carkhuff-Berenson model, actually be harmful to clients functioning at level three or above.

Carkhuff, Piaget, and Pierce (1968) reported that persons at different developmental levels in the helping professions show a corresponding difference in their levels of facilitative conditions. They found that the overall level for 32 freshmen and sophomores was 1.5; for 24 senior psychology measures, 1.9; and for 25 first-year graduate students in psychology, 2.3. These levels included ratings on concreteness or specificity of counselor response, but these ratings were not markedly different from those on the other three dimensions. With the exception of one sub-group in the freshman-sophomore sample, all subjects had indicated interest in the helping professions. The level of 2.3 is barely adequate to be of assistance to any clients except those at a very low level of functioning. Carkhuff (1968) reported further evidence (Carkhuff & Berenson, 1967), however, which suggested that "at the beginning of graduate preparation, graduate students in the helping professions are functioning at the highest level at which, on the average, they will ever function" (Carkhuff, 1968, pp. 255-256, italics added). This conclusion was based on the data from the Bergin and Solomon study which was conducted near the end of a doctoral preparation program in clinical psychology. Although there appears to be some increase in level of functioning after the preparation program, the practitioners studied had not reached the levels achieved by first-year psychology graduate students (Carkhuff, 1968).

Thus, it appears that the level of formal preparation bears little relationship to the helper's level of functioning, and that the helper--whether a master's-level school counselor or a doctoral-level clinical psychologist--rarely functions at a level of facilitative conditions sufficient to aid more than a small portion of the population whom he has chosen to serve. And even more distressing is the strong indication that the higher-level clients may actually be harmed by the low-level counselors now serving in schools, clinics, and agencies.

The research and theoretical formulations reviewed here indicate an alarming assessment of school counseling directed toward improving the personal functioning of students. It can be safely assumed that the vast majority of students with whom the school counselor will work will function beyond level two. It further appears, based on the five studies reviewed, that the average level of facilitative conditions provided by school counselors is approximately 2.5. If these two estimates are accurate, and if the Carkhuff-Berenson model is valid, it is fair to conclude that at least half of the counseling relationships in which the typical school counselor participates are apt to have harmful consequences to the student who comes for help.

Implications

It cannot be too strongly emphasized that the research presented here applies to the counselor's impact upon the student's personal functioning via the counseling relationship, and it does not bear directly upon the effects of the other guidance services which are

normally provided by the school counselor. The following implications, then, pertain only to the counselor's functioning in a personal counseling relationship with a student who is experiencing subjective distress or who is seeking to better understand himself and his world.

1. The conclusion of this paper argues for a clear division of labor among school counselors in terms of levels of facilitative conditions offered. A few counselors should be free to concentrate on individual and group counseling because they have a beneficial impact on the personal functioning of students. There are many other counselors who should concentrate exclusively upon the non-interpersonal relationship aspects of the guidance program because they are either ineffectual or actually harmful in their personal encounters with students.

2. Counselor education programs have the dual obligation to (a) take the steps necessary to enable the counselor candidate to function at the highest possible levels of facilitative conditions, and (b) specify in the graduate's professional credentials his capacity for entering into growth producing relationships with students. Truax and Carkhuff (1967) have described a didactic-experiential program designed to enable students to function at high levels. It would be expected that a graduate of a counselor preparation program who failed to offer minimally facilitative levels would not be recommended for a position in which he would do counseling. The graduate's competency should, of course, be subject to periodic review and revision with further supervised experience.

3. There is need for continued development of counseling skill and sensitivity as well as personal development beyond the formal university preparation program. Some counselors will need in-service education experiences to overcome the negative effects of their counselor education experiences (Carkhuff, 1968). Others will need continued work to prevent "backsliding" (Munger, Myers & Brown, 1963), which seems to occur among school counselors, particularly, it would appear, in employment settings in which the counselor has few professional colleagues (Wasson & Strowig, 1965). The counselor needs to identify within or outside of his staff persons with whom he can consult regarding his counseling with students. During 1968-69, the University of Florida NDEA Guidance Institute will prepare 30 such consultants to be of direct assistance to practicing school counselors.

4. The person in charge of administering the guidance program plays a key role in the employment and supervision of counselors. Without samples of counselor-student interaction, it is difficult to assess an applicant's impact upon students. It is not unreasonable to ask an applicant to supply a recorded sample of his counseling interview behavior for review where he seeks a counseling position. Guidance directors can easily obtain aid from many counselor educators in obtaining professional ratings of facilitative conditions offered.

In addition, the guidance director or supervisor should organize the guidance program in such a way that the counselors who do have facilitative capacity do the counseling, and those who do not handle guidance tasks of a non-counseling nature. The coordination of referrals among counselors is a key task for the guidance director.

5. In retrospect, the formulation presented here provides a possible explanation for the lukewarm response to school counseling services reported in a number of studies (Bigelow & Humphreys, 1967; Dunlop, 1965; Shertzer & Stone, 1963). If the student in search of a clear view of self or in subjective discomfort meets frequently with a counselor who offers low levels of empathic understanding, genuineness, and respect, it is small wonder that he place the school counselor far down his list of potential help-givers.

School counseling <u>can</u> be for better or for worse.

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